



“Putting Money Where Our Mouths Are: Libraries Funding Open Access Publishing”

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Introduction

Like research libraries around the world, members of the Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) have seen the growth of open access (OA) as a mode of scholarly communication and a resulting rise in the number of open access journals. Today there are nearly 9,000 open access journals published worldwide.¹ A common business model adopted by open access journals for funding their operations is collection of Article Processing Charges (APC) from authors. As a means of supporting the open access movement and encouraging their faculty to publish in open access journals, many universities have established campus-based open access funds. In a 2012 survey² of ASERL members about their open access advocacy activities, more than 1/3 of the responding libraries indicated that they currently administer an open access fund, and several additional libraries indicated plans to launch funds in the near future. I recently chatted with several ASERL members³ about the status of the open access fund at their university. The conversations revealed similarities and differences with respect to management and use of open access funds, which are likely reflective of experiences at other universities.

Fund Structure

Conversations with open access fund administrators revealed the multiple ways in which campus-based open access funds are funded. For most, a combination of sources supplies the monies to the fund. A common funding scenario features equal contributions from the library, the provost, and the university's office of research. Libraries are also committing portions of their central collections budgets to supporting open access publishing. The collective hope is that diversion of funds from subscriptions to support of open access will encourage publishers to adopt open access as a model and reduce subscription costs. At the same time, universities should be educating their faculty on the cost of publishing and the values of open access. Until

¹ See Heather Morrison's "Dramatic Growth of Open Access" for quarterly updates on the increasing number of open access articles and journals. <http://poeticeconomics.blogspot.ca/2006/08/dramatic-growth-of-open-access-series.html>

² For a summary of the full survey, please visit http://www.aserl.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/OA_Survey_Exec_Summary.pdf.

³ I interviewed Gail McMillan (Virginia Tech), Lisa Macklin (Emory University), Claudia Holland (George Mason University), Kevin Smith (Duke University), Molly Keener (Wake Forest University), and Robin Sinn (John Hopkins University). I also administer the Open Access Fund at University of Florida Libraries and have included my experiences in this reflection on campus-based open access funds.

there is such a level of awareness to bring about the desired shift in publishing economics, libraries will be faced with the decision of potentially canceling subscriptions in order to continue financially supporting open access publishing activities of the faculty.⁴

Interestingly, ASERL libraries have experienced some very different levels of use of the OA funds. One of the funds is still operating with its initial allocation dating from 2008, while a couple funds have run out of monies several times during their lives, leaving faculty waiting for notice regarding the funds' uncertain future. Libraries have capitalized on this by presenting evidence about the utilization of the fund by faculty and graduate students from diverse disciplines and the growing support within the greater academy for open access, oftentimes leading to recurring support for the OA funds across multiple years. The funds represented in this report allocated from \$12,000-\$75,000 annually for support of open access publishing.

Eligibility of Applicants and Publications

ASERL libraries are using their OA publication fund as a "fund of last resort," that is, researchers with grant monies must use grant funds to pay APC charges. Additionally, all librarians I interviewed noted that the failure to include publication costs in a grant application was "not an excuse" for waiver of this eligibility criterion, and all had denied awards on the basis of available grant funding. There were differences in processes used to verify an applicant's grant status. While some fund administrators regularly verified the availability of grant funds to the applicant through the university's office managing sponsored research, others simply took applicants at their word regarding the availability of other monies to cover open access publication costs.

All fund administrators permitted applications from faculty, students and staff. One fund administrator reported no difference in the number of tenured versus untenured faculty applying for assistance. This is interesting because a common argument against open access is the reliance of tenure and promotion upon publication of articles in journals with high impact factors or rankings, both of which may not be assigned to or measured for many open access publications. That untenured faculty are publishing in open access journals at the same rate as tenured faculty may discredit this perceived weakness of publishing in open access journals. Additionally, two fund administrators indicated that the faculty at the medical colleges affiliated with their universities were not eligible for support through their campus-based open access fund. Interestingly, these same two funds experienced slower rates of fund depletion experienced at universities that provided APC funds for medical faculty. This supports the

⁴ For more on the cost of open access publishing see Richard VanNoorden's article "Open access: The true cost of science publishing." *Nature*, v. 495, Issue 7442, March 27, 2013. <http://www.nature.com/news/open-access-the-true-cost-of-science-publishing-1.12676>

common perception that open access is most prevalent and accepted within medical and other life sciences.

There was some variance in practice regarding support of APC charges in “hybrid” open access journals. Hybrid open access journals are those that charge a subscription for access to journal content but also permit open access to those articles where the author has paid an open access fee. Most OA fund administrators believe publishers have added to their revenue stream by collecting the additional dollars from authors willing to pay to make their work openly accessible. As a result, most OA fund administrators in ASERL do not provide funding for hybrid journal articles. However, one fund administrator supports hybrid journals as their library did not want to close any avenue to making research available through open access; if an author was interested in making his/her article available open access, even if through a subscription journal, the library felt fund should support it.

Perceived Quality of OA Journals

There was also much discussion of the quality of open access publications. Most administrators reported that they had rejected applications on the basis of poor journal quality. Quality decisions were typically based upon a listing in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) and adherence to OASPA’s Code of Conduct⁵. The use of Beall’s List of Predatory Publishers⁶ for determining eligibility was also discussed. While all admired the thought and work that is put into maintenance of Beall’s List, many believed it should not be relied upon exclusively as an arbiter of quality or ethical practice. Some administrators believe the criteria of Beall’s List, if applied, could potentially exclude high-ranking traditional, subscription-based scholarly journals on account of their business and editorial practices. Others felt the criteria also have the potential of mislabeling good quality journals that are too new to be fully tested as predatory, or those that focus on such niche or specialized topics that their coverage and appeal to a narrow group of scholars matters more than adherence to potentially arbitrary criteria.

Fund Usage

The usage of the campus-based funds within ASERL libraries mirrored the national trend of open access prevalence in the sciences. Administrators reported that the departments most often using their funds came from medicine, nursing, veterinary medicine, and engineering. All funds had applications from the social sciences and humanities, and one fund administrator indicated that support through the fund of publication of open access books would likely encourage usage in those disciplines. The fund administrators also concurred that faculty and students from business related disciplines had not applied for funds. It is unclear whether a

⁵ <http://oaspa.org/membership/code-of-conduct/>

⁶ <http://scholarlyoa.com/2012/12/06/bealls-list-of-predatory-publishers-2013/>

paucity of open access business journals, attitudes of business colleges, or availability of other funds has led to the lack of participation from these disciplines in open access publishing.

Related to the usage of the fund, we discussed how our campus-based funds had been marketed. Typical marketing venues were reported – websites, brochures, and targeted emails. However, the most effective marketing tactic appeared to be word of mouth; most applicants learned about the fund through other applicants. Further, despite their marketing efforts, administrators were still dismayed by how many faculty had never heard of the fund, even after it had been in place for a few years. Through this discussion, administrators indicated a desire that library liaisons or subject experts engage more with faculty and students about scholarly communication issues and inform them of the resources available for publication support.

A few administrators noted spikes in the number of applications submitted at various times during the year. There was no clear correlation between the timing of these spikes and the academic calendar nor discernible publishing cycles. This was a point of considerable curiosity, and we determined this may be worth investigating on a larger scale.

Future of Open Access Funds

The conversation about campus-based open access funds concluded with a discussion of their sustainability. While all agreed that the availability of open access publishing funds was an important part of a university's overall open access advocacy plan ("it's putting money where our mouth is"), most fund administrators agreed that the business model of authors paying APCs was not sustainable in the long-term. The administrators were intrigued by emerging business models adopted by the journals eLife⁷ and PeerJ⁸, and the success of these new models will be watched closely. The outcomes of the directive from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy⁹ and the proposed Fair Access to Science and Technology Research Act¹⁰ will also greatly impact the future of funding open access publishing and will be closely monitored. The group pondered whether libraries should be diverting funds used to pay subscriptions to large, expensive bundles of largely low-use journals into support of open access, and how libraries could better advocate the many open access journals that do not charge any APCs. Regardless, the APC model of funding open access is likely here to stay for the foreseeable future; if universities want to support open access in more than words alone, the administrators believe universities – not just libraries – should plan to sustain campus-based open access funds through recurring funding.

⁷ <http://www.elifesciences.org/>

⁸ <https://peerj.com/>

⁹ "Increasing Access to the Results of Federally Funded Scientific Research," Memorandum of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, February 22, 2013.

http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/ostp_public_access_memo_2013.pdf

¹⁰ Sen. 350, 113th Cong. (Feb. 13, 2013). H.R. 708, 113th Cong. (Feb. 13, 2013).

Conclusion

The Fall 2012 survey of ASERL member libraries regarding their open access activities revealed a keen awareness of and a high percentage of participation in open access advocacy and support. Distribution of funds to support open access publishing is just one of the ways ASERL members promote open access to research. In order to facilitate further conversation and collaboration in open access and other scholarly communication initiatives, ASERL has undertaken development of a scholarly communications program. Through presentations on scholarly communications topics such as altmetrics and library publishing, an in-person event on the role of open access in liaison activities, and the appointment of a visiting program officer for scholarly communications, ASERL hopes to inspire its members to continued advocacy and leadership in the area of scholarly communications.

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